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ABSTRACT

Information from the National Survey on Gang Migration and other literature provides a look at the relationship between gang migration and proliferation. "Gang migration" refers to the movement of gang members from one city to another. Whether such movement has played a major role in the proliferation has been the focus of several studies, including the National Survey on Gang Migration conducted in 1992. Law enforcement personnel in approximately 1,100 cities answered questions about the movement of local gang members, and telephone interviews were conducted with law enforcement officers in 211 cities that reported the arrival of at least 10 migrant gang members in 1991. Findings from these studies and other data provide evidence that gang member migration, although widespread, should not be viewed as the major culprit in the nationwide proliferation of gangs. Law enforcement officers usually do not see migrants as the cause of gang problems. Cities with gang problems should examine the dynamics of their own communities before attributing their gang problems to outside influences. (Contains 3 figures, 2 tables, and 33 references.) (SLD)

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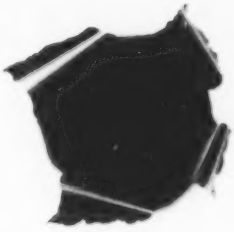
U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Shay Bilchik, Administrator

October 1998

JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Gang Members on the Move



Cheryl L. Maxson

The proliferation of youth gangs since 1980 has fueled the public's fear and magnified possible misconceptions about youth gangs. To address the mounting concern about youth gangs, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Youth Gang Series delves into many of the key issues related to youth gangs. The series considers issues such as gang migration, gang growth, female involvement with gangs, homicide, drugs and violence, and the needs of communities and youth who live in the presence of youth gangs.

In recent years, local government officials, law enforcement officers, and community organizations have witnessed the emergence and growth of gangs in U.S. cities once thought to be immune to the crime and violence associated with street gangs in large metropolitan areas. Police chiefs, mayors, school officials, community activists, and public health officials have gone so far as to identify this proliferation as an epidemic. Reports of big-city gang members fanning out across the Nation seeking new markets for drug distribution have added fuel to concerns about gang proliferation and gang migration.

The increase in gang migration has generated the need for the issue to be assessed based on empirical evidence. As local communities attempt to address gang-related problems in their areas, it is critical that they have a clear understanding of patterns of gang migration and an accurate assessment of local, or indigenous, gang membership.

This Bulletin explores how key terms such as "gang," "gang proliferation," and "gang migration" are defined; how and whether gang migration affects gang proliferation; and trends reported in research literature. This Bulletin is based in part on work supported by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and an article previously published in the *National Institute of Justice Journal* (Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1996).* Findings from a recent University of Southern California (USC) study on street-gang migration are also discussed (Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995).

Clarifying the Concepts

Defining the Terms "Gang," "Gang Proliferation," and "Gang Migration"

Gang. There has been much debate over the term "gang," but little progress

**This Bulletin expands on and updates previous analyses and published findings. OJJDP believes this Bulletin presents a unique contribution to the field by providing an analysis of chronic and emergent gang cities with regard to gang migration, a key factor in the discussion of gang proliferation.*

From the Administrator

As an increasing number of small cities and communities are beset by the emergence and growth of youth gangs—once regarded as the problem of major metropolitan cities—concerns about gang migration and its effects on gang proliferation have grown. Evidence of gang migration for purposes of drug distribution and other activities has been presented by law enforcement, the media, and others.

But what is the true scope of gang migration and what types of gangs migrate? A clear understanding of the nature and scope of gang migration and its impact on local gang activities is critical. *Gang Members on the Move* attempts to clarify the concepts of "gang" and "gang migration," and draws on the National Survey on Gang Migration and other literature to provide a preliminary but enlightening look at the relationship between gang migration and proliferation.

Although the author, noted researcher Cheryl Maxson, acknowledges the need for additional research on gang migration and its effects, she concludes that communities should examine their own dynamics before attributing their gang problems to migration. Indeed, we need to look at all of the factors that contribute to gang problems locally if we are to design a prevention, intervention, and suppression strategy to address them effectively.

Shay Bilchik
Administrator

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has been made toward widespread acceptance of a uniform definition. Some researchers prefer a broad definition that includes group criminal and noncriminal activities, whereas law enforcement agencies tend to use definitions that expedite the cataloging of groups for purposes of statistical analysis or prosecution. Variations in the forms or structure of gangs make it difficult to put forth one standard definition (Klein and Maxson, 1996). For example, researchers have attempted to draw a distinction between street gangs and drug gangs (Klein, 1995). Drug gangs are perceived as smaller, more cohesive, and more hierarchical than most street gangs and are exclusively focused on conducting drug deals and defending drug territories. Street gangs, on the other hand, engage in a wide array of criminal activity. Drug gangs may be subgroups of street gangs or may develop independently of street gangs. For the purposes of this Bulletin and the national surveys on gang migration conducted by USC, gangs were defined as groups of adolescents and/or young adults who see themselves as a group (as do others) and have been involved in enough crime to be of considerable concern to law enforcement and the community (Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995). In the USC survey, drug gangs were included in the overall grouping of gangs, but members of motorcycle gangs, prison-based gangs, graffiti taggers, and racial supremacy groups were excluded to narrow the focus to street gangs.

Another challenge in defining the term "gang" is the fluctuating structure of these groups. Over the course of adolescence and young adulthood, individual members move in and out of gangs, continually affecting the gangs' structure (Thornberry et al., 1993). The terms "wannabe," "core," "fringe," "associate," "hardcore," and "O.G." (original gangster) reflect the changing levels of involvement and the fact that the boundaries of gang membership are penetrable. Some researchers argue that the term "member" was created and used by law enforcement, gang researchers, and individuals engaged in gang activity with only a loose consensus of generalized, shared meaning.

Gang proliferation. The term "gang proliferation" indicates the increase in communities reporting the existence of gangs and gang problems (Knox et al., 1996). While gangs have existed in various forms, degrees, and locations in the United States for many decades, the sheer volume of cities and towns documenting recent gang activity cannot be denied. Some of this increase may be attributed to a heightened awareness of gang issues, redirection of law enforcement attention, widespread training, and national education campaigns. Nevertheless, gangs exist in locations previously unaffected and attract a larger proportion of adolescents than in the past.[1]

Gang migration. The already difficult task of defining gangs is compounded when the relationship between gang migration and proliferation is addressed. Gang migration—the movement of gang members from one city to another—has been mentioned with increasing frequency in State legislative task force investigations, government-sponsored conferences, and law enforcement accounts at the Federal, State, and local levels (Bonfante, 1995; Hayeslip, 1989; California Council on Criminal Justice, 1989; Genelin and Coplen, 1989; McKinney, 1988; National Drug Intelligence Center, 1994, 1996). For the USC study, migration was broadly defined to include temporary relocations, such as visits to relatives, short trips to sell drugs or develop other criminal enterprises, and longer stays while escaping crackdowns on gangs or gang activity. More permanent changes, such as residential moves (either individually or with family members) and court placements, were also included. Individuals in the study did not have to participate in gang activity in the destination city to be considered gang migrants. This broad definition of gang migration allowed researchers to investigate the degree of gang-organized and gang-supported expansion of members to other locations, of which little evidence was found. It also allowed researchers to examine variations in gang activity in the destination city and the many reasons for relocating. If the concept of migration was limited to individuals or groups traveling solely for gang-related purposes or at the direction of gang leaders, the patterns of migration would change drastically. Further, collective gang migration is rare, but the migration of individual gang members is not.

Another complication in defining gang migration is the distinction between

[1] Few studies attempt to assess the proportion and age of adolescent gang members within a given area. Recent information on self-identified membership from longitudinal projects for representative samples in Denver, CO, and Rochester, NY, (Thornberry and Burch, 1997) is available from the OJJDP-funded Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency. Approximately 5 percent of youth living in "high-risk" neighborhoods in Denver indicated that they were gang members in any given year (Esbensen, Huizinga, and Weiher, 1993). In Rochester, 30 percent of the sample reported gang membership at some point between the beginning of the seventh grade and the end of high school (Thornberry and Burch, 1997). To address the issue of gang proliferation within Denver or Rochester, new samples would need to be examined to determine whether the proportion of youth joining gangs in these cities has increased since the initial sampling period (nearly 10 years ago).

Prevalence estimates derived from law enforcement identification of gang members have been challenged, as when Reiner (1992) reported that, according to the gang data base maintained for Los Angeles County, 9.5 percent of all men ages 21 to 24 were identified gang members. However, this proportion increased to 47 percent when the analysis was limited to black males ages 21 to 24. This figure has been generally recognized as a vast overstatement of black gang membership.

migrant gang members (migrants) and indigenous gang members, which often fades over time. As migrants settle into new locations, sometimes joining local gangs, their identities may evolve to the point to which their prior gang affiliation no longer exists. This process of assimilation into local gang subcultures has not been addressed in research literature, because law enforcement officers and researchers have only recently begun to discuss gang migration. In future studies, researchers should consider at what point a migrant gang member is no longer perceived as a migrant but as a local gang member in the new location.

The Influence of Gang Migration on Gang Proliferation

The primary focus of this Bulletin is to assess whether gang migration has played a major role in gang proliferation. Migrant gang members may stimulate the growth of gangs and gang membership through a variety of processes, such as recruiting locals to establish a branch of the gang in previously unaffected areas. This approach, described as the importation model, involves efforts by gang members to infuse their gang into new cities, primarily to establish new drug markets and other money-making criminal enterprises (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). This is also referred to as gang franchising (Knox et al., 1996) and gang colonization (Quinn, Tobolowsky, and Downs, 1994). Alternatively, migrants may establish a new gang without structural affiliation to an existing gang. Furthermore, if a sufficient number of individuals from a gang move to a new location, they may replicate a migrant subset of their former gang. No matter what process is used, new local gangs will most likely emerge in response to territorial challenges or perceived protection needs. The city with a single gang is a rare phenomenon (Klein, 1995). Regardless of the pattern of new gang initiation, gang member migration would create an increase in both the number of gangs and gang membership.

Another way migrant gangs may stimulate gang proliferation is by introducing new and exciting cultural distinctions from existing gangs. In a city in which gangs exist but are not firmly established, migrant gang members may act as cultural carriers of the folkways, mythologies, and other trappings of more sophisticated urban gangs. They may offer strong distinctions from other gangs and cause a rivalry with existing gangs, such as the rivalry between the Bloods and Crips in southern California and between the People and Folks in the Midwest. Most of the respondents in the 1993 USC phone survey reported that migrants influence local gang rivalries, gang dress codes, and recruiting methods (Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995). In addition, the solidification of local gang subcultures may increase the visibility or attractiveness of gangs to local youth. It may also influence the growth of rival gangs.

Conversely, there are a variety of circumstances in which migrant gang members have little or no impact on gang proliferation. If the geographic location allows, migrants may retain their affiliation with their original gangs by commuting to old territories or they may simply discontinue gang activity altogether. In cities with relatively large and established gangs, it is unlikely that migrant gang members would have a noticeable effect on the overall gang environment.

An important related issue is the impact of migrant gang members on local crime patterns.[2] Migrants are generally perceived as contributing to both increased levels of crime and the seriousness of criminal activity (Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995). The 1993 USC survey involved telephone interviews with law enforcement in 211 cities that experienced gang migration in 1992. Most of the cities involved in the survey (86 percent) reported that migrant gang members contributed to an increase in local crime rates or patterns primarily in theft (50-percent increase), robbery (35-percent increase), other violent crimes (59-percent increase), and, to a lesser extent, drug sales (24-percent increase). The small increase in drug sale activity can most likely be attributed to competition from established local drug markets. The survey also showed that the type of criminal gang activity was changing to include increased use of firearms and more sophisticated weapons (36-percent increase). Carjackings, firebombings, residential robberies, drive-by shootings, and advanced techniques for vehicle theft were also cited on occasion. Changes in the targets of criminal activity and the use of other technological advances were mentioned less frequently.

[2] Whether or not migrants provide a catalyst to local gang proliferation, their impact on local crime is of considerable concern to law enforcement.

What Previous Studies Show

The following is a summary of the research literature on the relationship between migration and proliferation. Local law enforcement agencies have become increasingly aware of the usefulness of maintaining systematic information on gangs, yet such data bases hardly meet the scientific standards of reliability and validity. Therefore, the results of the studies described in this section should be viewed as exploratory.

Although a number of national studies dating back to the 1970's have documented an increase in the number of cities and smaller communities reporting street gang activity, the numbers reported by these studies vary (Miller, 1975, 1982; Needle and Stapleton, 1983; Spergel and Curry, 1990; Curry, Ball, and Fox, 1994; Klein, 1995; Curry, 1996). Variations in localities reporting gang activities are attributed to the use of different sampling frames in the national surveys. While the surveys are not compatible, each reports increased gang activity. Miller's 1996 compilation of data from several sources documents gang proliferation during the past three decades and shows that in the 1970's, street gangs existed in the United States in 201 cities and 70 counties (many with cities included in the former count) (Miller, 1996). These figures climbed to 468 and 247, respectively, during the 1980's and to 1,487 and 706 in the 1990's. A nationwide survey conducted by the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) reported that in 1995 gangs existed in 1,492 cities and 515 counties (OJJDP, 1997). The figures reported by Miller and NYGC are considerably higher than the estimate of 760 jurisdictions reported by Curry and his associates (Curry, Ball, and Decker, 1996) and the projection of 1,200 gang cities derived from the 1992 USC national mail survey (reported in Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995). Similarly, the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) reported a much smaller figure of 265 for cities and counties reporting gang activity in 1995 (NDIC, 1996). Of these 265 cities and counties, 182 jurisdictions reported gang "connections" to 234 other cities, but the nature of these relationships was not elaborated on (D. Mehall, NDIC, personal communication, August 20, 1996). With the exception of the Mehall report and that of Maxson, Woods, and Klein (1995), none of the studies addressed the issue of gang migration on a national scale.

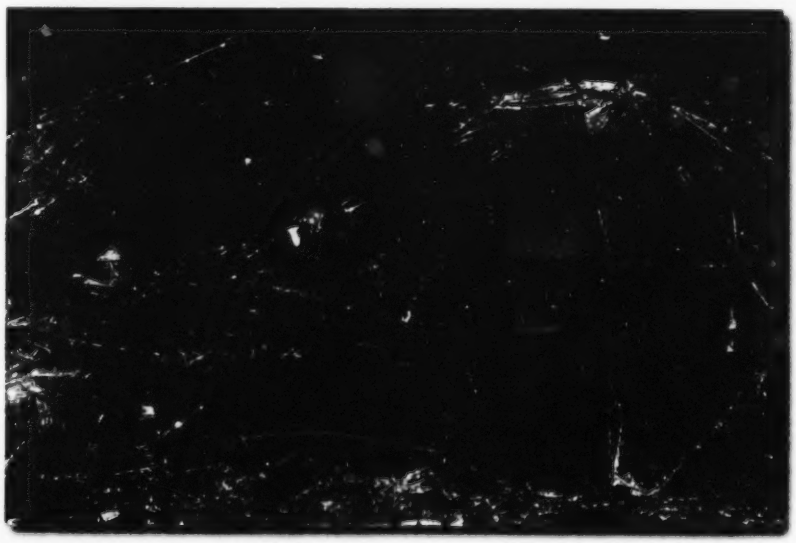
With few exceptions, findings on gang migration reported in research literature contrast sharply with the perspectives presented by the media, government agencies, and law enforcement reports. Several researchers have studied gangs in various cities throughout the United States and examined their origin and relationships to gangs in larger cities (primarily Chicago) to examine correlations between gang migration and proliferation on a more regional scale.

Gangs in the Midwestern United States

In 1983, Rosenbaum and Grant identified three Evanston, IL, gangs as "satellites" of major Chicago gangs, but proceeded to emphasize that they "are composed largely of Evanston residents, and in a very real sense, are Evanston gangs" (p. 15). They also found that two indigenous gangs, with no outside connection, contributed disproportionately to levels of violence and were, therefore, "almost totally responsible for increasing fear of crime in the community and forcing current reactions to the problem" (Rosenbaum and Grant, 1983:21). In contrast, the Chicago-connected gangs maintained a lower profile and were more profit oriented in their illegal activities, aspiring "to be more like organized crime" (Rosenbaum and Grant, 1983:21). In other words, the gangs indigenous to Evanston seemed to be more of a threat to the community than the Chicago-based gangs. The conclusion can be drawn that in this particular study, the migration of gangs into Evanston only minimally affected the proliferation of gang activities.

In an extensive study of Milwaukee gangs in 1988, 18 groups were found to use the names and symbols of major Chicago gangs, including identification with such gang confederations as People versus Folk (Hagedorn, 1988). In questioning gang founders on the origins of the gangs, it was determined that only 4 of the 18 were formed directly by gang members who had moved from Chicago to Milwaukee. Further, these members maintained only slight ties to their original Chicago gangs. Despite law enforcement claims to the contrary, no existence of a super-gang (i.e., Chicago) coalition was found in Milwaukee. Founding gang members strongly resented the idea that their gang was in any way tied to the original Chicago gangs (Hagedorn, 1988). In this study, Hagedorn concludes that gang formation in Milwaukee was only minimally affected by the migration of Chicago gangs. If anything, the influence was more cultural than structural, because gangs in smaller cities tend to follow big-city gang traditions and borrow cultural aspects from these gang images.

Further supporting the notion that gang migration only minimally affects proliferation is a 1989 study that determined that gangs in Columbus and Cleveland, OH, originated from streetcorner groups and breakdancing/rapping groups and also from migrating street-gang leaders from Chicago or Los Angeles (Huff, 1989). The study found no evidence that Ohio gangs were directly affiliated with gangs from other cities, particularly Chicago, Detroit, or Los Angeles.



In 1992, researchers examined the role that Chicago gangs played in the emergence of youth gangs in Kenosha, WI (Zevitz and Takata, 1992). Based on interviews with gang members, police analyses, and social service and school records, the study concluded that "the regional gangs in this study were products of local development even though they had a cultural affinity with their metropolitan counterparts. . . . We found no convincing evidence that metropolitan gangs had branched out to the outlying community where our study took place" (Zevitz and Takata, 1992:102). Regular contact between some Chicago and Kenosha gang members reflected kinship or old neighborhood ties rather than the organizational expansion of Chicago gangs.

These findings are echoed in a 1996 study of 99 gang members in St. Louis (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). A minority (16 percent) of those interviewed suggested that gangs reemerged in St. Louis, MO, through the efforts of gang members from Los Angeles. Several of these migrants had relocated for social reasons, such as visiting relatives. The study also found that St. Louis gangs were more likely to originate as a result of neighborhood conflicts influenced by popular culture rather than from big-city connections.

> The powerful images of Los Angeles gangs, conveyed through movies, clothes, and music, provided a symbolic reference point for these antagonisms. In this way, popular culture provided the symbols and rhetoric of gang affiliation and activities that galvanized neighborhood rivalries (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996:88).

Another study on gang migration in 1996 surveyed 752 jurisdictions in Illinois (Knox et al., 1996). (Because only 38 percent of the law enforcement agencies responded, these findings should be interpreted cautiously.) The majority of respondents (88 percent) reported that gangs from outside their area had established an influence, that one-fifth or more of their local gang population was attributable to recent arrivals (49 percent), that parental relocation of gang members served to transplant the gang problem to the area (65 percent), and that some of their gang problem was due to gang migration (69 percent). The study concluded that, while the impact of migration varies, "it is still of considerable interest to the law enforcement community" (Knox et al., 1996:78).

Gangs in the Western United States

In a study of drug sales and violence among San Francisco gangs, 550 gang members from 84 different gangs were interviewed (Waldorf, 1993). Of these, only three groups reported relationships with other gangs outside San Francisco. The report concluded that:

> . . . most gangs do not have the skills or knowledge to move to other communities and establish new markets for drug sales. While it is true they can and do function on their own turf they are often like fish out of water when they go elsewhere. . . . They are not like organized crime figures (Mafia and Colombian cocaine cartels) who have capital, knowledge and power . . . while it might be romantic to think that the L.A. Bloods and Crips are exceptional, I will remain skeptical that they are more competent than other gangs (Waldorf, 1993:8).

To the contrary, a 1988 study of inmates in California correctional institutions and law enforcement and correctional officials suggested high levels of mobility among "entrepreneurial" California gang members traveling long distances to establish drug distribution outlets and maintaining close ties to their gangs of origin (Skolnick et al., 1990; Skolnick, 1990). Among all the empirical studies conducted in this area, Skolnick's resonates most closely with the reports from law enforcement previously cited (Bonfante, 1995; Hayeslip, 1989; California Council on Criminal Justice, 1989; Genelin and Coplen, 1989; McKinney, 1988; National Drug Intelligence Center, 1994, 1996).

> Against a backdrop of escalating violence, declining drug prices, and intensified law enforcement, Los Angeles area gang-related drug dealers are seeking new venues to sell the Midas product—crack cocaine. . . . Respondents claim to have either participated in or have knowledge of Blood or Crip crack operations in 22 states and at least 27 cities. In fact, it appears difficult to overstate the penetration of Blood and Crip members into other states (Skolnick, 1990:8).

But the sheer presence of Crips and Bloods in States other than California is a poor indicator of gang migration. The 1996 NDIC survey identified 180 jurisdictions in 42 States with gangs claiming affiliation with the Bloods and/or Crips. At the same time, the NDIC report cautions against assuming organizational links from gang names.

> It is important to note that when a gang has claimed affiliation with the Bloods or Crips, or a gang has taken the name of a nationally known gang, this does not necessarily indicate that this gang is a part of a group with a national infrastructure. While some gangs have interstate connections and a hierarchical structure, the majority of gangs do not fit this profile (NDIC, 1996:v).

Gangs in the South-Central United States

In a 1994 study of 9 States located in the south-central United States, 131 municipal police departments were surveyed; 79 cities completed the mail survey (Quinn, Tobolowsky, and Downs, 1994). Respondents in 44 percent of small cities (populations between 15,000 and 50,000) and 41 percent of large cities (populations greater than 50,000) stated that their largest gang was affiliated with groups in other cities. It is unknown whether the perceived affiliation was based on structural links or on name association. Nearly three-fourths of the 792 gang cities that responded to the 1992 USC mail survey reported that at least some indigenous gangs adopted gang names generally associated with Los Angeles and Chicago (e.g., Bloods, Crips, Vicelords, Gangster Disciples, or Latin Kings). Approximately 60 of these cities had no gang migration.

The National Survey on Gang Migration

In 1992, the University of Southern California conducted a mail survey of law enforcement personnel in approximately 1,100 U.S. cities. The survey was distributed to all cities with a population of more than 100,000 and to more than 900 cities and towns that serve as likely environments for street gangs or gang migration.[3] Law enforcement officials suggested municipalities to include in the survey, and all cities with organizations that investigate gangs were included. To increase the survey pool, the survey asked respondents to list cities to which their local gang members had moved. This sample is best characterized as a purposive sample of gang cities—it is neither representative of all U.S. cities and towns, although all large cities are enumerated fully, or all gang cities.[4] This survey captured data on the largest number of cities with gangs identified at the time (and a majority of the cities identified by the NYGC survey in 1995) and is the only systematic enumeration of U.S. cities experiencing gang migration to date. Repeated mailings and telephone followup resulted in completion of the survey by more than 90 percent of those polled.

To develop descriptions about the nature of gang migration and local responses to it, extensive telephone interviews were conducted with law enforcement officers in 211 cities that reported the arrival of at least 10 migrant gang members in 1991.

[3] It should be noted that incorporated cities (of all population sizes) were the unit of analysis in this study; unincorporated areas were not included. Whenever cities contracted law enforcement responsibilities to sheriff's departments or State police, such agencies were pursued as respondents. Letters were addressed to the head agency official with a request to pass the survey on to the individual in the department most familiar with the gang situation within the city jurisdiction.

[4] A random sample of 60 cities with a population of between 10,000 and 100,000 was surveyed for gang migration or local street-gang presence. Projections from this sample indicate a much larger number of U.S. cities with gang migration than have been identified to date.

Interview participants were sampled from a larger pool of 480 cities that cited at least moderate levels of gang migration. Other facets of the study included interviews with community informants and case studies, including personal interviews with migrant gang members.[5]

A primary limitation of this research design is the necessity to rely on law enforcement for depictions of the scope and nature of gang migration. Locally based ethnographic approaches—based on the systematic recording of particular human cultures—would lend a more comprehensive view of the migration situation in individual cities. The USC case studies involved a range of informants whose depictions sometimes contrasted markedly with law enforcement's assessment of the issue. The attempt to extend beyond law enforcement to community respondents produced mixed results, because informants were generally less informed about migration matters in the city as a whole and tended to focus on particular neighborhoods of interest. It would seem that law enforcement is the best available source of information on national patterns of gang migration, but the reader should be wary of the limitations on law enforcement as a source of information on migration. These limitations include the occupational focus of law enforcement on crime (i.e., if migrants are not engaged in a lot of crime, they are less likely to come to the attention of law enforcement), the lack of local data bases with systematically gathered information about migration, and the definitional challenges described earlier in Clarifying the Concepts. Given these limitations, the results from this study should be viewed as exploratory until replicated by further research.

Study Findings

The national scope of gang migration. Approximately 1,000 cities responded to the 1992 mail survey, revealing 710 cities that had experienced gang migration by 1992. The widespread distribution of these cities is reflected in figure 1.[6] Only three States had not experienced gang migration by 1992—New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Vermont. The concentration of migration cities in several regions—most dramatically southern California and the Bay area, the area surrounding Chicago, and southern Florida—may obscure the geographic distribution. Forty-four percent of migration cities are located in the western region of the country, with slightly less prominence in the midwestern (26 percent) and southern (25 percent) portions of the country. Only 5 percent of the migration cities are situated in the northeastern region of the country.

Approximately 80 percent of cities with a population of more than 100,000 have migrant gang members. The overall sample cannot address the proportion of all smaller cities with migration, but the distribution of migration cities by population, shown in figure 2, suggests that this is an issue confronting cities of all sizes. That nearly 100 towns with populations of 10,000 people or less experienced gang migration is striking. This phenomenon is a manifestation of the motivations to relocate and the potential influences of migrant gang members on small-town life and overtaxed law enforcement resources. Moreover, because smaller cities are less likely to have longstanding gang problems, gang migration could be a catalyst for the onset of local gang problems.

The sheer number of cities with migrant gang members and the widespread geographic distribution of these cities across the country is dramatic, but the volume of gang migration presents a far less alarming picture. Survey respondents provided an estimate of the number of migrants that had arrived in their city the year prior to survey completion.[7] Just under half (47 percent) of the 597 cities providing an estimate reported the arrival of no more than 10 migrants in the prior year. Only 34 cities (6 percent) estimated the arrival of more than 100 migrants during this period. The significance of such numbers would vary by the size of the city, but the large number of cities reporting insubstantial levels of migration suggests that gang migration may not represent a serious problem in many cities.

Survey respondents were asked to provide a demographic profile of migrant

[5] These data are not presented in this report. Also not included are data from interviews with law enforcement in 15 cities that reported drug-gang migration only. This report refers to street-gang, rather than drug-gang, migration. See earlier discussion under Clarifying the Concepts for the distinction between the two types.

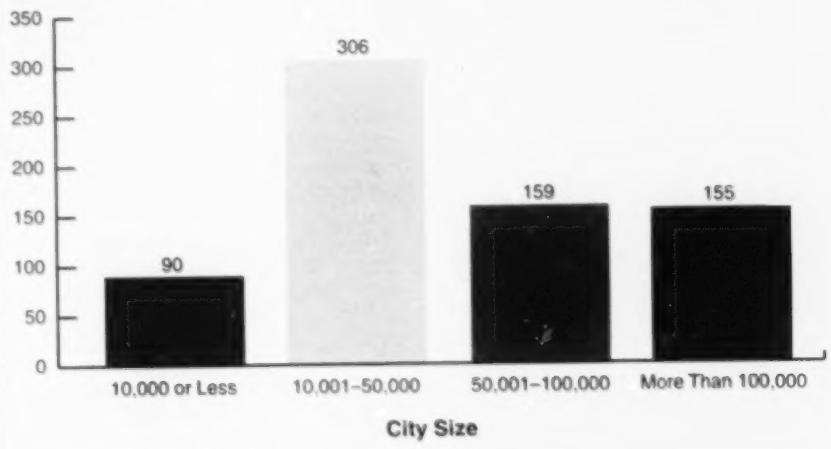
[6] A few cities with gang migration were not included in this map because respondents were unable to specify the year of the first arrival of gang members from other cities.

[7] A separate estimate of the total number of migrants was discarded as less reliable than the annual estimate. Even the annual estimate should be considered with caution, as few departments maintained records on gang migration. Some officers had difficulty generalizing to the city as a whole, based upon their own experience, and many migrants presumably do not come to the attention of the police.

Figure 1: Cities Experiencing Gang Member Migration Through 1992

Number of Cities = 694

Figure 2: 710 Gang Migration Cities by Population



gang members. The typical age reported ranged from 13 to 30, and the mean and median age was 18. Female migrants were uncommon; more than 80 percent of the cities noted five or fewer. Compared with the ethnic distribution of gang members nationally, migrant gang members were somewhat more likely to be black. Approximately half of the cities polled in the survey reported that at least 60 percent of migrant gang members were black; predominantly Hispanic distributions emerged in 28 percent of the cities. The predominance of Asian (14 cities or 7 percent) or white (2 cities) migrant gang members was unusual.

Gang migration and local gang proliferation. The potential for gang migration to have a harmful impact on local gang activity and crime rates may increase substantially if migrant gang members foster the proliferation of local gang problems in their destination cities. This is a pivotal issue, and data of several types are available for elaboration. The characteristics of cities with local gangs can be compared with those of cities with migrant gangs to establish the parameters of the relationship. Of particular interest are the dates of local gang formation and migration onset. Law enforcement perceptions about the causes of local gang problems are also relevant. Lastly, the motivations of gang members to migrate and their patterns of gang activity upon arrival must be considered.

Through the survey of 1,100 cities, it was found that most, but not all, cities that have local gangs also have migrant gang members. Conversely, nearly all cities with gang migration also have local gangs. The 1992 survey identified 792 cities with local gangs; of these cities, 127 (16 percent) reported no experience with gang migration (table 1). Only 45 of the 700 identified migration cities (6 percent) had no indigenous gangs. This simple comparison yields 172 cities (22 percent) in which migration could not have caused the emergence of local gangs, at least through 1992. The large proportion of cities with both local and migrant gang members made it difficult to detect any differences between local gang and migrant gang cities. Distributions across city size categories and geographic region are negligible (data not shown).

Another pertinent point of comparison from the survey is the date of onset of local gangs and the year in which migrant gang members first arrived in cities with local and migrant gang members. (These data are shown in figure 3 with some loss of cases due to the respondents' inability to estimate at least one of the dates.) Only 31 of cities with local gangs (5 percent) reported the onset of gang migration at least 1 year prior to the emergence of local gangs. Most cities (54 percent) had local gangs prior to gang migration. Adding these 344 cities (i.e., those with local gangs before migrants) to the prior figure of 172 cities that have just one or the other gang type yields a total of 516 cities that clearly challenge the notion of migration as the cause of local gang proliferation. While the picture for cities with coincidental onset of the two types of gang members is ambiguous, it seems reasonable to conclude that cities in which migration provides the catalyst for indigenous gang formation are the exception rather than the rule. The telephone interviews confirm this pattern; the majority of informants (81 percent) disagreed with the statement, "Without migration, this city wouldn't have a gang problem."

It can be argued that the concern over gang migration is most pertinent to emerging gang cities. The national gang surveys (Miller, 1996) discussed earlier have shown that the major proliferation of gang cities has occurred since the 1980's.* Nearly 70 percent of the 781 gang cities that could provide a date of emergence reported one after 1985. These cities can be characterized as "emergent" rather than "chronic" gang cities (Spergel and Curry, 1990). Emergent gang cities are equally as likely to report gang migration as chronic cities (84 percent of the cities in each group). However, cities with gang onset after 1985 are significantly less likely to report that local gangs preceded gang migration (40 percent versus 88 percent), as might be expected when they are compared with cities with longstanding local gang problems.

* Klein (1995) provides a highly illustrative series of maps displaying dates of onset of local gang problems using data gathered in the migration study.

Table 1: Cities With Local Gangs or Gang Migration

	No Gang Migration	Gang Migration
Cities with no local gangs	182	45
Cities with local gangs	127	665

Source: Maxson, Woods, and Klein (1995).

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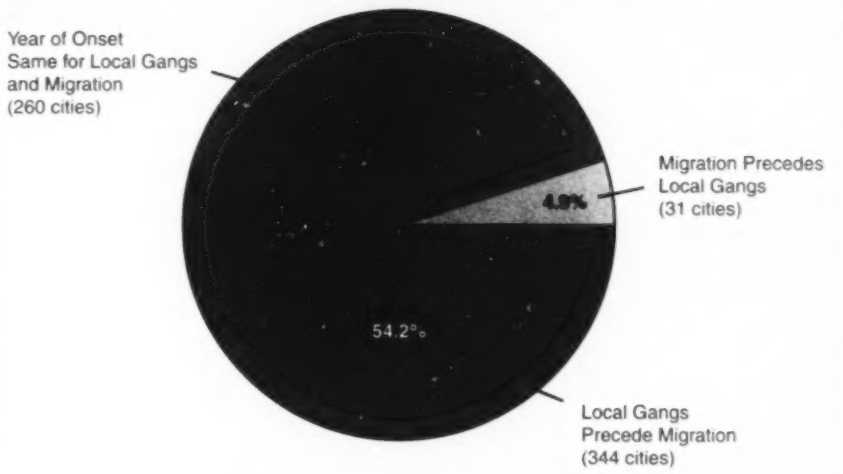
Figure 3: Dates of Onset of Local Gangs vs. Migration



Emergent cities are more likely to experience the onset of local gangs and migrants in the same year as opposed to chronic cities (53 percent versus 11 percent). The majority of respondents interviewed from emergent gang cities believed that migration was not the cause of local gang problems. This figure was significantly lower for emergent gang cities (73 percent) than for chronic gang cities (93 percent). This shows that the conclusion that migration is not generally the catalyst for gang proliferation holds up, but the exceptions to this general rule can most often be found in emergent gang cities.

Patterns of gang migration. Examination of the reasons gang members migrate to other cities and their patterns of gang affiliation in the new city shows that migration is not a major catalyst of gang proliferation. Survey interviewers asked participating officers to choose from a list of reasons why most gang members moved into their cities. The most frequently cited reason was that gang members moved with their families (39 percent). When this was combined with the reason of staying with relatives and friends, 57 percent of the survey respondents believed that migrants relocated primarily for social reasons. Drug market expansion was the second most frequently cited motivation (20 percent of cities) for migrating. When this was combined with other criminal opportunities, it created a larger category of illegal attractions, or "pull" motivators, in 32 percent of cities reporting an influx of migrant gangs. "Push" motivators that forced gang members to leave cities, such as law enforcement crackdowns (8 percent), court-ordered relocation, or a desire to escape gangs, were cited in 11 percent of migrant-recipient cities.

Are these patterns of motivation for migrating different in cities with emergent gangs as compared with those cities with chronic local gang problems? The data shown in table 2 provide evidence that they clearly are not. Emergent gang cities have nearly equal proportions of socially motivated gang migration as chronic gang cities. "Pull" motivators (primarily drug market expansion) and "push" motivators are less frequent reasons for gang member relocation than social motivations in both types of city.

There are no differences between the two types of gang cities with regard to patterns of migrant gang activity. Approximately one-third (38 percent) of survey respondents stated that gang migrants established new gangs or recruited for their old gangs; 36 percent reported that gang migrants joined existing local gangs or exclusively retained affiliation with their old gangs. The proportions of each in chronic and emergent gang cities are quite similar (data not shown). Thus, data on motivations for migrating and on migrant patterns in joining gangs provide little support for the view of migrants as primary agents of gang proliferation and no evidence for differential impact on emergent gang cities.

Conclusion

The interpretation of these results should be tempered by an awareness of the limitations of the USC study methodology. The surveys used to collect data relied heavily on law enforcement as a source of information. A logical next step would involve using an array of informants, including courts, schools, and social service providers in addition to community residents and gang members. It should also be noted that the USC data are cross-sectional in nature and cannot adequately describe second- or third-order waves of migration, wherein some individuals may travel from city to city.[9] Another untapped dimension in the USC survey was termed "indirect migration," in which one gang is influenced by another gang that was influenced by a third gang. For example, Pocatello, ID, gangs were heavily influenced by gangs from Salt Lake City, which were started by gang members from Los Angeles (R. Olsen, Pocatello Police Department, personal communication, September 24, 1996). Other patterns of sequential mobility were reported on during the USC interviews, but did not occur with sufficient frequency to warrant further analysis.

The findings from the 1992 and 1993 USC surveys provide evidence that gang member migration, although widespread, should not be viewed as the major culprit in the nationwide proliferation of gangs. Local, indigenous gangs usually exist prior to gang migration, and migrants are not generally viewed by local law enforcement as the cause of gang problems. This pattern is less evident in cities in which gangs have emerged more recently, but these municipalities are no more likely to experience gang migration than chronic gang cities. Moreover, the motivations for gang member relocation (i.e., more often socially motivated than driven by crime opportunities) and patterns of gang participation (equally likely to join existing gangs as to retain original affiliation in order to initiate new gangs or branches) do not distinguish migrants in the two types of cities. Proponents of the "outside agitator" hypothesis of gang formation as described by Hagedorn (1988) will find little support in the data available from the USC national study.

[9] The interviews with migrant gang members gathered data on multiple moves, but there were too few instances from which to generalize. The author acknowledges Scott Decker for his observation of this limitation of the study design.

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Table 2: Most Frequent Reasons for Migration Reported by Chronic and Emergent Gang Cities

Motivation	Chronic Gang Cities (*n*=73)	Emergent Gang Cities (*n*=111)
Social	41 (56%)	63 (57%)
"Pulls"	22 (30%)	37 (33%)
"Pushes"	10 (14%)	11 (10%)

Note: "Pull" motivators (e.g., drug markets) are those that attract gang members to relocate in specific locations. "Push" motivators, such as law enforcement crackdowns, are those that force gang members to leave cities and relocate elsewhere.

On the whole, the USC findings agree with the research literature on gangs cited earlier. Many of the researchers—Rosenbaum and Grant (1983), Hagedorn (1988), Huff (1989), Zevitz and Takata (1992), Decker and Van Winkle (1996), and Waldorf (1993)—found that gang formation was only minimally affected by the diffusion of gang members from other cities. The findings reported by some researchers—Skolnick et al. (1990) and NDIC (1994, 1996)—are less consistent with those reported in the USC study. The Skolnick et al. and NDIC studies focused heavily on drug issues and may have disproportionately represented cities with drug-gang migration or with migrants that moved for drug expansion purposes.[10] Such cities reflect a distinct pattern of gang migration—older gang migrants, traveling longer distances, staying for briefer periods (see Maxson, Woods, and Klein, 1995, for full presentation of these analyses). Research that focuses on drug matters may fail to capture more prevalent trends. Although more often the subject of media coverage, migration for drug distribution purposes is less common than other types of migration. The differential patterns of gang migration, and their effects on local communities, require more research.

In addition, the USC findings are difficult to compare with those reported by Knox et al. (1996). Respondents in the Knox et al. study presented a widespread perception of outside gang influence. This may be the result of exposure to the media and products of the entertainment industry. Klein (1995) and others have suggested that the diffusion of gang culture in the media plays a key role in the proliferation of gang membership. Our Nation's youth are hardly dependent on direct contact with gang members for exposure to the more dramatic manifestations of gang culture, which is readily accessible in youth-oriented television programming, popular movies, and the recent spate of "tell-all" books from reputed urban gang leaders. The nature of this influence and its impact on gang participation and expansion have not been investigated systematically but are crucial in understanding fully the dynamics of gang proliferation.

Cities with emerging gang situations should examine the dynamics of their own communities before attributing their gang problems to outside influences. Socioeconomic factors, such as persistent unemployment, residential segregation, and the lack of recreational, educational, and vocational services for youth, are more likely sources of gang formation or expansion than is gang migration.

[10] The Skolnick and NDIC studies employed purposive rather than representative sampling techniques.

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OJJDP's National Youth Gang Center

As part of its comprehensive, coordinated response to America's gang problem, OJJDP funds the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC). NYGC assists State and local jurisdictions in the collection, analysis, and exchange of information on gang-related demographics, legislation, literature, research, and promising program strategies. It also coordinates activities of the OJJDP Gang Consortium—a group of Federal agencies, gang program representatives, and service providers that works to coordinate gang information and programs. For more information contact:

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Information newly available on the Web site includes gang-related legislation by subject and by State and the Youth Gang Consortium Survey of Gang Problems

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Related Readings

In addition to the Youth Gang Bulletin series, other gang-related publications, sponsored by OJJDP and other Office of Justice Programs agencies, are available from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC). These publications include:

Youth Gangs: An Overview. 1998. NCJ 167249.

A Comprehensive Response to America's Youth Gang Problem (Fact Sheet). March 1997. FS 009640.

1995 National Youth Gang Survey (Program Summary). August 1997. NCJ 164728.

Youth Gangs (Fact Sheet). December 1997. FS 009772.

Gang Members and Delinquent Behavior (Bulletin). 1997. NCJ 165154.

Addressing Community Gang Problems: A Model for Problem Solving (Monograph). 1997. NCJ 156059.

Highlights of the 1995 National Youth Gang Survey (Fact Sheet). 1997. FS 009763.

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